AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1. **(Currently amended)** A method for the prevention or retarding of staling during the baking process of bakery products which comprises the step of adding an amount of at least one intermediate thermostable and/or thermostable serine protease to a dough prior to baking, wherein said serine protease has a temperature activity optimum higher than 60°C, wherein said thermostable serine protease further has a ratio between the activity at optimum temperature and the activity at 25°C higher than 10, wherein said amount is effective to prevent or retard staling in said bakery products and has ~~substantially~~ no ~~effect~~ perceivable action on dough rheology.

2. **(Canceled)**

3. **(Previously presented)** The method according to the claim 1, wherein the ratio between the protease activity at optimum temperature and the protease activity at 25°C is higher than 15.

4. **(Previously presented)** The method according to Claim 1, wherein the intermediate thermostable and/or thermostable serine protease is obtained by extraction from naturally-occurring eukaryotic or prokaryotic organisms, by synthesis or by genetic engineering.

5. **(Previously presented)** The method according to Claim 1, wherein the intermediate thermostable and/or thermostable serine protease is a neutral protease.

6. **(Previously presented)** The method according to Claim 1, wherein said protease is selected from the group consisting of aqualysin I, aqualysin II, thermitase and keratinase.

7. **(Previously presented)** The method according to Claim 1, wherein the thermostable serine protease is a Taq protease isolated from *Thermus aquaticus* LMG 8924, a keratinase, isolated from *Bacillus licheniformis* LMG 7561 and/or a thermitase isolated from *Thermoactinomyces vulgaris*.

8. **(Previously presented)** The method according to Claim 1, further comprising the step of adding another anti-staling additive selected from the group consisting of thermostable α-amylase, β-amylase, intermediate thermostable maltogenic amylase, lipase, glycolsyltransferases, pullulanases and emulsifiers.

9. **(Previously presented)** The method according to Claim 1, wherein the bakery product is selected from the group consisting of bread, soft rolls, bagels, donuts, Danish pastry, hamburger rolls, pizza, pita bread and cakes.

10. **(Previously presented)** An improver for the prevention or retarding of staling during the baking process of bakery products, wherein said improver comprises at least one intermediate thermostable and/or thermostable serine protease, wherein said serine protease has a temperature activity optimum higher than 60°C, and a ratio of activity at optimum temperature to activity at 25°C higher than 10.

11. **(Canceled)**

12. **(Canceled)**

13. **(Previously presented)** The improver as in Claim 10, wherein said protease is obtained by extraction from naturally occurring eukaryotic or prokaryotic organisms, by synthesis or by genetic engineering

14. **(Previously presented)** The improver as in Claim 10, wherein said protease is a Taq protease, a keratinase and/or a thermitase.

15. **(Previously presented)** The improver as in Claim 10, wherein said protease is selected from the group consisting of aqualysin I, aqualysin II, keratinase and thermitase.

16. **(Previously presented)** The improver according to Claim 10, wherein the thermostable serine protease is a Taq protease isolated from *Thermus aquaticus* LMG 8924, a keratinase isolated from *Bacillus licheniformis* LMG 7561 and/or a thermitase isolated from *Thermoactinomyces vulgaris*.

17. **(Previously presented)** The improver as in Claim 10, further comprising another anti-staling additive selected from the group consisting of thermostable α-amylase, β-amylase, intermediate thermostable maltogenic amylase, lipase, glycolsyltransferases, pullulanases and emulsifiers.

18. **(Previously presented)** The improver as in Claim 10, wherein said improver is a bread improver.

19. **(Canceled)**

20. **(Canceled)**

21. **(Canceled)**

22. **(Canceled)**

23. **(Previously presented)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the intermediate thermostable and/or thermostable serine protease has a temperature activity optimum higher than 70°C.

24. **(Previously presented)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the intermediate thermostable and/or thermostable serine protease has a temperature activity optimum higher than 75°C.

25. **(Previously presented)** The method of Claim 23, wherein the ratio between the protease activity at optimum temperature and the protease activity at 25°C is higher than 15.

26. **(Previously presented)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the intermediate thermostable and/or thermostable serine protease is an alkaline protease.

27. **(Previously presented)** The method of Claim 8, wherein said emulsifiers are selected from the group consisting of monoglycerides, diglycerides and stearoyllactylates.

28. **(Previously presented)** The improver of Claim 10, wherein said protease has a temperature activity optimum higher that 70°C.

29. **(Previously presented)** The improver of Claim 10, wherein said protease has a temperature activity optimum higher that 75°C.

30. **(Previously presented)** The improver of Claim 10, wherein the ratio between the protease activity at optimum temperature and the protease activity at 25°C is higher than 15.

31. **(Previously presented)** The improver of Claim 17, wherein said emulsifiers are selected from the group consisting of monoglycerides, diglycerides and stearoyllactylates.

32. (**Previously presented**) The method according to claim 1, wherein the intermediate thermostable and/or thermostable serine protease is added in an amount of at least about 600 units/100 kg flour protein.

33. (**New**) The method according to claim 15, wherein the protease is aqualysin I.

34. (**New**) The method according to claim 15, wherein the protease is aqualysin II.